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THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES, THE PRIVATE SECTOR, PARLIAMENTARIANS, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND OTHER PARTNERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HABITAT AGENDA

Note by the Secretariat

SUMMARY

At its third session held in New York from 5 to 16 February 1996, the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) decided to include in the provisional agenda of the Conference an item on the role and contribution of local authorities, the private sector, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and other partners in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda (see A/CONF.165/PC.3/7, annex I, decision 3/3). The present note has been prepared by the Secretariat to facilitate the work of the Conference under this item. At the Conference the item will be taken up by Committee II. Accordingly, the note provides a brief rationale of the need for a broad partnership for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and describes the proposed process by which the views of non-State partners on their respective roles in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, as well as their potential contribution, will be elicited during the Conference, leading finally to a series of suggested recommendations by the Habitat II Conference on a framework of cooperation between the international community, national Governments and non-State partners, and the relationships amongst them, in carrying out the programmes and objectives of the plan of action of the Conference, the Habitat Agenda.

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I. BACKGROUND

1. The collective power of people to shape the future is greater now than ever before, and the need to exercise it is more compelling. Mobilizing that power to make life in the twenty-first century more democratic, more secure and more sustainable is the foremost challenge of this generation. The world needs a new vision that can galvanize people everywhere to achieve higher levels of cooperation in areas of common concern and shared destiny. 1/

2. For there is no doubt that the past decades have radically transformed the world and the agenda of global concerns and this transformation is what has given impetus to that series of major United Nations conferences of the 1990s, beginning with UNCED and culminating with Habitat II, with the aim of responding to emerging global challenges, whether political, economic, social and environmental, to reach agreement on a common agenda and to harness the energies and talents of people everywhere around a shared vision of social and economic progress in the next century.

3. For the Habitat II Conference, two trends in particular stand out which will significantly shape the course of human settlements development and management in the twenty-first century: the progressive urbanization of the globe and the devolution of powers and responsibilities away from national Governments to other institutions, organizations and sectors of civil society. The reasons which underlie these defining phenomena range from profound global and national economic and social change to the acceleration and deepening of processes of democratization and participation in many countries, with a host of new political and social organizations demanding a voice in national and local affairs, fuelling what has been called elsewhere an "associational revolution".

4. This has had a powerful impact on the mechanics and modalities of international cooperation as well. One figure is illustrative enough: whereas a number of international non-governmental organizations operating in at least three countries was less than 200 at the beginning of the century, and barely changed for the next six decades, since the 1960s that number has grown to a phenomenal 30,000 today and is increasing yearly. When combined with the activities of other organizations which fall outside the traditional intergovernmental framework, this amounts to a parallel network for international cooperation which must fully be taken into account and appreciated in the follow-up to the Habitat II Conference at the international, national and local levels. Further, as responsibility for economic growth, investment and development is progressively shifting to the private sector, any plan of action, to be successful, must be able to enlist the support of private economic agents, from companies to banks to financial markets, among many others.

Habitat II: a new partnership for development

5. This is particularly critical in the case of the Habitat Agenda, for in a more and more urbanized world, human settlements, large and small, will be the primary locus and focus of economic activities of social and political transformation and of efforts to improve the quality of human life, as well as

that of the environment. This not only requires the active engagement of local authorities, but of all of those with a stake in human settlements, given the growing diffusion of political and economic power and responsibilities in societies today. For no single actor will have the resources, nor the power - economic, social or political - to determine the course of human settlements growth and development; it requires the cooperation of others. All of the preceding has profound implications for the new partnerships needed at the international, national and local levels to achieve sustainable development. It has profound implications for the international community, and for national Governments, on how to conceive effective strategies for sustainable development.

6. The need for broad partnerships to achieve sustainable development was already foreshadowed at the "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro in 1992: Agenda 21, the global plan of action adopted in Rio, specifically calls on those outside central government, all "major groups", to take up specific tasks and responsibilities in the implementation of the Agenda. The preparatory process for the "City Summit" has taken up where the "Earth Summit" left off, with the goal of making the preparatory process and the Habitat II Conference a true exercise in partnership, with the ultimate aim to carry forward this partnership in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the years following the Conference, as it will be absolutely essential to successful implementation.

The Habitat II preparatory process: the role of partners

7. Already the preparatory process for the Habitat II Conference has demonstrated the efficiency and wisdom of this partnership approach. It has enriched the preparatory process and the draft Habitat Agenda. Local authorities and their associations, sister United Nations agencies and other multilateral institutions, parliamentarians, the private business sector and private foundations, non-governmental and community-based organizations, research institutes, investors, professional associations, religious communities and women's and youth organizations have all made significant contributions during the preparatory activities which synthesized the principal issues of sustainable human settlements development to be addressed in the Habitat Agenda. During the preparations for the Conference, their knowledge of and perspectives on the challenges encountered today in every facet of life and work in urban and rural settlements were taken up: from transportation to participation; from housing to water supply; from health to governance and conflict resolution; from land tenure to finance. All these issues were addressed by the Habitat II partners both outside and inside open national committees established by Governments, at regional meetings and expert gatherings. Having made a substantial contribution to the content of the Habitat Agenda, it is reasonable to expect that the various sets of non-State partners which have participated in the formulation of the Habitat Agenda will also be active partners of national Governments and the international community in its implementation.

A new division of responsibilities and tasks

8. For given the new emerging political, economic and social realities at the national and international levels for the reasons already indicated, the new responsibilities of both national Governments and institutions, agencies and organizations active at the global level will be primarily one of enablement, of facilitating a process whereby all participants in human settlements development and management act synergically towards common goals of the Habitat Agenda. In other words: at the national level, central Governments would promote development through partnership, mediate conflicting positions and take the leading role in coordinating the political process of this new partnership for development within the framework of overall agreed upon national economic, social and environmental objectives. At the international level, multilateral institutions and organizations, in particular the agencies of the United Nations system, will have to take on a similar role, and reach out to new partners, sharing costs and responsibilities, while working towards mutually shared goals.

The emerging major partners

9. And who will be their new partners? In the field of human settlements, they are in the first place local authorities, the level of government which has the daily responsibility for sustainable settlements growth and development. Second, the private sector, which in the decades to come will have the primary responsibility for investment in infrastructure, jobs, housing and services. To this must be added the growing "third sector" of civil society, from foundations to non-governmental and community-based organizations, which are more and more taking on tasks which up to now were public responsibilities in the social arena, in the field of health care, housing, service provision and education, among others. The "third sector" also includes advocacy groups, from women's and youth organizations to environmental and human rights activists, all of which a part of that social mosaic which are a human settlement and have a vital role in ensuring that they are just, equitable and sustainable.

10. The major partners also include other important groups of actors whose contributions will be essential in articulating human settlements needs and concerns at the national, regional and international levels. These include parliamentarians, on whose actions as legislators will depend to a significant degree whether human settlements receive the kind of political support at the national level which can facilitate sustainable local development. Included among the new partners are also trade unions and professional organizations, whether active at the national or international levels. For globalization and urbanization is bringing with it new and unanticipated challenges and technological and social change, affecting not only employment structures and the perspectives for work, but also confronting human settlements professionals with new tasks, related to the physical design and the environmental, social and economic sustainability of settlements growth and development. New avenues of research must be explored, new technologies designed and put on stream.

The Habitat Agenda as a global social contract among partners

11. Recognition of the contributions of all these sets of actors to future human settlements development has informed the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) from the outset, and was the primary reason for adopting the partnership approach that has been so successful in the run-up to Istanbul. Just as success in the preparatory process was not conceivable without the active involvement of these partners, neither will the implementation of the Habitat Agenda proceed on course without their active engagement. For human settlements development to proceed, all partners must commit themselves to undertake specific actions within the framework of the Habitat Agenda, turning the Agenda, in effect, into a global social contract for sustainable local development. National Governments, or for that matter, national Governments working in conjunction with existing multilateral institutions and agencies, cannot do it alone, especially if one considers that over the coming decades as a consequence of globalization and urbanization, human settlements, and in particular, towns and cities, will hold everyone's attention as they will be the key to economic and social progress and environmental sustainability, on the one hand, while the decisions that will ultimately determine whether cities and towns will prosper will be made by private investors and companies and by other institutions and organizations of civil society, on the other. At the same time, given the centrality of human settlements to a sustainable future, it is also self-evident that it is ultimately in the self-interest of all, whether entrepreneur or slum dweller, government official or artisan, that they flourish. The challenges are immense, whether from an environmental, social or economic perspective. The financial resource requirements for infrastructure, services and housing alone are enormous, and beyond the capacity of the public sector and multilateral institutions to provide on their own. But they must be found if development, economic growth and employment generation are to proceed at the pace required to guarantee global political and social stability. Everyone therefore has a vital stake in the sustainable development of human settlements, and this is why all have a stake in the Habitat Agenda and its implementation.

12. This is the undertaking which initially compelled all those outside of central government to join the preparatory process, and unless the goals and programmes of the Habitat Agenda are taken up by the organizations and institutions of civil society everywhere, internalized and reflected in the activities of economic actors, professionals, political groups and social organizations, the Agenda will not succeed in its aims. The consequences of this would be enormous, for the issues addressed in the Habitat Agenda are issues which every country, every locality will need to confront and resolve over the coming decades, with or without a Habitat Agenda. Having the Habitat Agenda, and by following its recommendations, will, however, allow the international community, as represented at the Habitat II Conference by international institutions and agencies, national Governments and the various major partners, to do so in a collective, coordinated, deliberate and, ultimately, in a less costly manner.

II. THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF PARTNERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HABITAT AGENDA

13. The second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was conceived from the beginning as a Conference of partners and partnership, and this is reflected in its preparatory process, in the workings of its Preparatory Committee, and partnership will have to be, for all the reasons already indicated, the guiding principle underlying the implementation strategy for the Habitat Agenda as well. One of the main tasks before the Conference at Istanbul will be to forge a practical, mutually beneficial, evolutionary modality that will create a dynamic and sustained working relationship between State and non-State partners for the successful implementation of the Habitat Agenda, supported at the international level by multilateral institutions, and, in particular by the United Nations system. For this to be fully realized, it will be essential that the following be kept in mind by all partners:

(a) The facilitating role of the State and central government institutions;

(b) The need to create a positive enabling environment, at the national and local levels, that will encourage the full participation of all actors in human settlements development;

(c) The need to implement institutional restructuring to accommodate meaningful participation of non-traditional partners in decision-making leading to sustainable human settlements development;

(d) Acceptance of the fact that in the twenty-first century, development will become increasingly a function of a wide range of partners, prominent among which is the private sector in all its forms;

(e) The need for greater accountability and transparency among the cooperating partners;

(f) The need to avoid duplication and to encourage functional specialization among the cooperating partners, whether at the international, national or local levels.

Enabling partnership

14. Furthermore, to enhance the contributions of all partners in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and to ensure their sustainability over time, the Conference may also wish to consider a strategic enabling approach in its recommendations, which includes, inter alia, the following:

(a) Development of planning and policy-making procedures that facilitate partnerships and cooperation between Governments, at all levels, and civil society, including the private sector;

(b) Facilitating business enterprises to pursue investment and other activities, including non-commercial activities, that can contribute to

sustainable human settlements development, especially in the generation of employment opportunities, provision of social support services in the community, and the acceleration of the construction of housing and infrastructure;

(c) Enabling and encouraging all major groups outside of Government to participate in the planning and implementation of human settlements development programmes, especially in relation to employment opportunities, access to social services such as health, education and training, and the rational use and conservation of non-renewable and environmental resources;

(d) Encouraging the creation of viable and equitable settlements and shelter development finance mechanisms, ensuring access to land and security of tenure, and ensuring gender equality in the settlements development process, among others;

(e) Encouraging research institutes and institutions of learning to undertake results-oriented research in the field of sustainable human settlements development and housing provision;

(f) Support at the international level, the creation of an effective, coordinated framework for cooperation in the areas of shelter and sustainable human settlements development and growth.

15. A strategic approach that includes these suggested measures, as well as others, will do much to facilitate the contribution of non-State partners to the implementation in such critical areas, as for example, shelter delivery, sustainable land use, urban and rural finance, provision of infrastructure and basic services, employment creation, environmental protection and conservation, sustainable transport and communication, preservation of cultural heritage, disaster prevention and mitigation. However, experience has shown that the building of partnerships for human settlements development can be complex, difficult and sometimes diffused. Although no easy solutions are available, a consensual approach to the forging of practical modalities in this endeavour must remain the accepted guiding principle at the Habitat II Conference when it addresses these issues at the "Partners Hearings" to be conducted by Committee II of the Conference.

III. THE PARTNERS HEARINGS AT ISTANBUL: BUILDING CONSENSUS, MAKING COMMITMENTS

16. These "Partners Hearings" will be central to making the Habitat II Conference a true conference on partnerships and, especially for forging a consensus among partners as to the manner by which they - along with national Governments and international agencies and bodies - will apportion tasks and begin to commit themselves to the implementation of those aspects of the Habitat Agenda most direct to their individual interests, expertise and area of responsibility. These Hearings provide the conduit between the formal Conference and the parallel meetings and events at Istanbul, and in particular the meetings of the major groupings of Habitat II partners which will take place in Istanbul just prior to the beginning of the Habitat II Conference.

The role of the partners fora

17. At these "Partners' Fora", local authorities, non-governmental organizations, unions, professionals, the private sector, parliamentarians and foundations will, inter alia, discuss their own future role in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and will be requested to prepare a written statement which will include:

(a) A brief description of each of the non-State partner's role in the preparatory process for the Conference as well as of the proceedings at their respective Partners Forum;

(b) A succinct summary of the issues involved in "housing for all" and "sustainable human settlement development in an urbanizing world", from the point of view of the global constituency of each of the partners fora;

(c) Specific commitments on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the plan of action of the Conference, as well as suggestions on the implementation strategy for the Habitat Agenda;

(d) Constraints, at the international, national and local levels, that in the view of the Partner, should be removed or attenuated so that the specific commitments made can be fulfilled.

These written statements from each of the partners fora will be forwarded and presented to Committee II to facilitate its work and the preparation of its report to the plenary of the Conference. It is expected that there will be seven partners fora in which local authorities, non-governmental organizations, private sector enterprises, professionals, foundations, trade unions and parliamentarians, respectively, will take part. With the exception of the NGO Forum, most of these will be one or two-day events. An additional day will be reserved for a Partners Assembly, which will allow for an open exchange of views across sectors and among all the partners.

The Hearings: expected procedure

18. It is envisaged that the Partners Hearings of Committee II will begin on the second day of the Conference and last approximately five days, with both morning and afternoon sessions. Each of the Partners Fora will select the names of their representatives at the hearings and forward them to the Chairperson of Committee II. Following an invitation by the Chairman of Committee II to address the Committee on a specific day and time, the representatives will present their statement to Committee II sitting in session. At the conclusion of the reading of the Statement, it is anticipated that delegations will be given the opportunity to direct questions at the representatives or to elicit explanations or clarifications on aspects of their respective statements. It is expected that the Bureau of the Conference, during the pre-Conference consultations from 1 to 2 June, will finalize the guidelines to be proposed for the conduct of the Hearings.

Contribution to the Conference

19. The aim of the hearings will be to allow the partners to present to the Conference their views on the implementation strategy for the Habitat Agenda, how they see their respective role in that implementation and what they consider to be the priorities for implementation. At the conclusion of the hearings, the Committee, informed by the partners fora through their representatives, will deliberate on its report, which is expected to include a series of Chairman's summaries of the deliberations of each of the forums and dialogues. It is also anticipated that the written contributions of the partners would constitute an annex to the report of the Conference. Further it is also expected that the Committee, informed by the Hearings, will also include recommendations on the future framework for cooperation among the various partners at the national, international and local levels. For this reason, one session during the hearings will be taken up by presentations by representatives of United Nations agencies to elicit their views on this critical aspect of implementation. It is also envisioned that the deliberations of Committee II, and its report, will be further informed by the presentations of the Chairpersons of the Forum on Human Solidarity and of the Habitat Dialogues for the 21st Century, a set of 10 high-level exchanges of views among experts on key issues of human settlements development which will be open to the public and which are expected to generate recommendations which will be presented to Committee II during the second week of the Conference.

Globalizing a shared vision

20. In sum then, the principal aim of the Partners Hearings to be held under the auspices of Committee II at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul will be to define priorities for action and to lay the groundwork for the practical modalities of cooperation post-Conference. The Partners Hearings should also allow the Conference to arrive at a consensus on the role of the Habitat II Partners, on the relationships amongst them as well as with central Governments and on their respective contributions to achieving sustainable human settlements development within the framework of the Habitat Agenda, based on their views, testimony and commitments. It is the expectation as well that the commitments and views on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, as expressed by the Partners, will be annexed to the report of the Conference and that the commitments made by them will be reflected in their respective policies and programmes of work post-Istanbul, leading to a globalized vision of human settlements development, to shared priorities and to new forms of cooperation at the international, national and local levels. Such diffusion among civil society of the goals, recommendations and programmes of the Habitat Agenda will ultimately be the best guarantor of success.

Notes

1/ From: "Our Global Neighbourhood", the report of the Commission on Global Governance, Oxford University Press, 1995.